

N E W S R E L E A S E

Contact: Patti Roberts
Kevin Callori
(916) 654-9029

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TWENTY-SEVEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES PARTICIPATE IN STATEWIDE LEADERSHIP FORUM

SACRAMENTO – Twenty-seven extraordinary high school students from throughout California gathered today on the West Steps of the State Capitol as part of an innovative five-day forum designed to help young people with disabilities reach their full potential. Each student was selected to attend the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for Students with Disabilities based on individual achievements and leadership qualities.

"These young people are setting an example for all of us. Their life stories are true 'profiles in courage'," said Patrick Henning, director of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency's Employment Development Department (EDD). "They refuse to be defined as 'disabled' and forced to sit on the sidelines in life. They are determined to overcome all obstacles and to play a leadership role in our society. We owe them our admiration. Even more, we owe them our commitment to tearing down the barriers, both physical and psychological, to their full participation in our society."

The delegates began the morning with a rally and photograph outside the Capitol, then went inside to the Governor's Council Room, where they joined administration and legislative leaders for a session on "How To Be an Effective Change Agent." The students then took a guided tour of the Capitol and visited individual Legislator's offices.

"The Youth Leadership Forum is an event that can be life changing for participants," said Catherine Campisi, chair of the 2007 Youth Leadership Forum Steering Committee and former Director of the state Department of Rehabilitation. "It seeks to give them a positive identity as a person with a disability and connects them with adult role models and resources to assist them in transitioning from high school to work and independent living."

The annual YLF is coordinated by a partnership of state agencies including EDD, the Department of Rehabilitation, Department of Education, California Workforce Investment Board, California State Council on Developmental Disabilities, State Independent Living Council, Institute on Human Services at Sonoma State University, and California Foundation for Independent Living Centers. Private donors included Wells Fargo Foundation, Lockheed Martin, the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers and Friends of Californians with Disabilities.

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California created the YLF concept in 1991 and was the first state to hold a YLF conference. Since then more than 33 states and Puerto Rico have followed California's lead. The primary purpose of the Forum is to prepare students with disabilities to reach their career goals, join the workforce, live independently, become involved in their communities, and continue their successes by learning from adults with disabilities who excel in their personal and professional lives.

During the Forum, student delegates negotiated a "Disability Awareness Obstacle Course," and met with alumni of earlier forums to discuss their experiences. The delegates have participated in leadership development programs, attended demonstrations of the latest technology and assistive devices, interactively learned about each other's disabilities, and received presentations and advice from motivational speakers and mentors.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A list of the 27 YLF participants, listed by county of residence, follows:

ALAMEDA COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Elisa Jones	Kensington	El Cerrito

CALAVERAS COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Brett Bunge	Hathaway Pines	Bret Harte Union

FRESNO COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Kevin Vu	Fresno	Hoover

IMPERIAL COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Cheyenne Duarte	Heber	Southwest

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Chase Longan	Valencia	Valencia
Samantha Meza	Whittier	Whittier
Herbie North III	Long Beach	Marina
Jeffrey Oglesby	Carson	Nathaniel Narbonne
Lauren Romero	Los Angeles	Franklin

MARIN COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Zoila Lara-Cea	Tiburon	Sterne School

MONTEREY COUNTY

<u>Delegate</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>High School</u>
Joseph Hayes	Monterey	North Monterey

(more)

NAPA COUNTY**Delegate**

Katie Love
Anthony Sweet

City

Napa
Napa

High School

Napa
Napa

SACRAMENTO COUNTY**Delegate**

Sarah Birdsong
Tyahna Smith
Mary Wiggins

City

Sacramento
Elk Grove
Sacramento

High School

John F. Kennedy
Monterey Trail
California School for the Deaf
– Fremont

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY**Delegate**

Joshua Harrison

City

Sky Forest

High School

Rim of the World

SAN DIEGO COUNTY**Delegate**

Jean-Paul Argoud
Debra Stewart

City

Imperial Beach
Escondido

High School

Mar Vista
Escondido Charter

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY**Delegate**

William Bernick

City

San Francisco

High School

George Washington

SANTA CLARA COUNTY**Delegate**

Kelli Lee

City

San Jose

High School

Henry M. Gunn

SOLANO COUNTY**Delegate**

Hortencia Gonzalez
LaToya Phea
Anekka Waddell

City

Vallejo
Vallejo
Vallejo

High School

Hogan
De Anza
Hogan

SONOMA COUNTY**Delegate**

McKenzie Merritt-Smith

City

Santa Rosa

High School

Maria Carrillo

VENTURA COUNTY**Delegate**

Katrina Smith

City

Newbury Park

High School

Newbury Park

YOLO COUNTY**Delegate**

Brandon Clark

City

Winters

High School

Winters

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